Cultural Knowledge Education

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"If you can't see that your own culture has its own set of interests, emotions, and biases, how can you expect to deal successfully with someone else's culture?" - Anne Fadiman

Introduction

Cultural awareness training is inadequate in current and future conflicts which require education in cultural knowledge through immersion, interaction, and integration. Soldiers and marines, warfighters, must have the ability to operate within foreign cultures that are significantly different.[1] Enemy that operate within a foreign population have inherent cultural advantages. Education in cultural knowledge mitigates those advantages.

Current and future conflicts require more than just winning the support of the people, but include knowledge in all elements of culture such as: political, military, economic, social, infrastructure, and information. Mitigating cultural differences require more than just awareness training, but immersion, interaction, and integration with societies of different cultures to develop warrior-diplomats that not only understand warfare, but also the art of negotiating without hostility.

Understanding Cultural Awareness

Warfighters are generally prepared to deal with the culture differences receiving "cultural awareness" training, but the focus of the training is primarily intended to avoid embarrassing social offenses.[2] Awareness training is incomplete. "Awareness" means to know that it exists without understanding.

Failure to understand cultural differences lead to anxieties and negative biases causing stereotyping for both warfighters and members of the foreign culture. Cultural awareness training is too simplistic and does not allow for full understanding. Warfighters in Iraq and Afganistan show that developing successful relationships that provide intelligence are more effective than just using weapon systems. Weapon systems alone cause incidents such as jets bombing weddings and funerals which have become common. Gaining the trust of the local people requires more than knowing about culture; it requires fully assimilating into their culture.

While warfighters have been trained in cultural awareness to avoid social offenses, it has lead to the false impression that awareness is enough. Failure to understand culture will prevent the warfighter from adapting to the cultural environment prolonging conflict.

Cultural Awareness is inadequate

Cultural awareness training is inadequate to develop relationships with foreign nations to render the enemy's inherent cultural advantage ineffective. This skills gap is particularly acute at the battalion level and below, where much of the interaction between the U.S. military and the population actually occurs.[3] Trainers at the battalion level and below generally lack skills in cultural knowledge including anthropological work, political science, sociology, economics, and area studies, thus providing inadequate and sometimes wrong information.[4] Trainers and battalions deploy to regions where they lack an in-depth understanding of the culture.

Cultural awareness training does not stress language skills. Interpreters are hired and used extensively rather than developing competent speakers in foreign languages. Language skills and regional expertise are not valued as principles of warfighting.[5]

Cultural awareness training does not consider information important. Cultural information has been on the rise, but still not considered as important within the Department of Defense's bureaucratic system as "one staff officer said the best resource he had was Google."[6] Warfighters frustrated dealing with the local population

struggle for correct information.

The answer is to develop education that meets these needs for the warfighters. Just military advisors are provided to other nation's militaries, commanders would benefit from cultural advisors who can identify legitimate leaders and the interests of the population such as: ethno-religious, class, and tribal groups. These advisors involved with planning to develop courses of action for institution building, economic development, governance, and military training.[7]

Because cultural awareness training is inadequate, programs in cultural knowledge must be developed to provide education as well as readily available information for the warfighter. Information should be available on anthropological work, political science, sociology, economics, and area studies. Programs need to implement education by immersion, interaction, and integration.

Cultural Knowledge Education

"Hence to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy'sresistance without fighting." - Sun Tzu

Cultural knowledge education is a holistic approach through immersion, interaction, and integration. Because

becoming competent within a foreign culture is challenging, studying foreign culture is required to mold intuitively adaptive and flexible skills. The culturally educated Warfighter will not alienate the population for legitimacy and final stability.[8] A thorough cultural educational background will prevent significant mistakes in cross-cultural interaction, and satisfy some or most of the populations needs.[9]

Cultural education must be coordinated across the Department of Defense. Commanders require access to expertise in foreign culture as well as having educated warfighters to become competent within foreign cultures. Competent cultural warfighters are able to have the foreign population work for and with them.

Cultural knowledge is complex, and it is about as intellectually attractive as the word "mess", but when broken down, educating culture can be learned quickly with confidence and motivation.[10] By breaking down learning into three steps, immersion, interaction, and integration, cultural knowledge can be obtained quickly and efficiently as a robust tool in order to facilitate mission accomplishment.[11]

Immersion

The Warfighter requires cultural skills that can be developed by immersion. The warfighter will be deployed to a region for culture exposure and will not have access to their native culture. Immersion will allow the warfighter to see the culture first hand rather than training on information retainment. In essence, the mind's eye will have a better chance of capturing a complete picture of the foreign culture for replication.[12]

Immersion begins with the warfighter introduced to the foreign language observing, studying, discussing, and receiving feedback to allow students to begin deviating from their ingrained behavior.[13] Immersion allows the warfighter to observe cultural differences and begin understanding and avoiding the negative consequences of norm violation and associated stereotypes.

Immersion begins with warfighters deployed to foreign regions to observe, study, discuss, and receive feedback to understand cultural differences. The next step interaction will apply those skills into developing relationships with the indigenous population.

Interaction

Interaction develops cross-cultural code-switching which is the ability to choose which culture to communicate with appropriate nonverbal and verbal behavior. The ability to code-switch between cultures will increase the likelihood of positive outcomes such as fitting in, being well-liked, and winning the respect, trust, and friendship of members of the indigenous culture. Code-switching will also spark a positive spiral of interpersonal communication within professional relationships providing immediate, positive impact on military's success.[14] Every interaction between the warfighter and the foreign culture is a building block. Single interactions compound after time to build dynamic situations that test the warfighter's ability to function successfully in a new setting and their comfort with new cultural rules.

Cultural adaptation deficiencies in situations may result in performance anxiety in front of a critical evaluative audience from the foreign culture.[15] Interaction may require behavior that may be in direct conflict with the warfighter's own culture causing anxiety or guilt; for instance, two males holding hands is common in Middle Eastern culture, but anxiety producing in American culture. An individual might have a cognitive awareness of cultural

differences, be motivated to use them, and, ordinarily speaking, have a high level of ability at adapting behavior across cultures but be unable to cope with the emotional challenges of switching behavior in a particular encounter.[16] Guilt and anxiety caused by differences in culture will make the cultural code-switching difficult.

Interaction builds cross-cultural code-switching that increase positive outcomes with the indigenous culture. Despite the negative emotions associated with code-switching, the ability to adapt to situations allow the warfighter to develop relationships with the local people dealing with political, social, and economic problems.

Integration

Integration is when the warfighter is competent to code-switch between his/her own culture and the foreign culture to build on dynamic situations with continued positive emotion. The warfighter is able to operate fully within the foreign culture will little negative anxieties or stereotypes. The warfighter understands the indigenous norms for appropriate behavior.

Experience can be acquired only by being involved in a culture other than one's own and is developed through foreign assignments, networking across borders, and the use

of multi country, multicultural teams to develop strategies
and programs. Integration allows for effective engagement
requiring a focused and raised comprehension of foreign and
nuanced communications with practical experience over
time.[17] The warfighter armed with this knowledge has the
skills to blend into foreign cultures and can learn new
cultures with the education model of immersion,
interaction, and integration.

Counterargument

While an educational program in cultural knowledge is
ideal, an educational program would consume large amount of
resources. Both time and effort may never create the
intended outcome of a warfighter who can code-switch as
well and the military already has these assets with Special
Operations. Cultural education programs requires an
exceptional program that understands people, their culture,
and their motivations[18], and education cannot change what is
already deeply ingrained. Other reasons education is a
poor solution is that Department of Defense funding
systems, and bureaucratic protectionism result in the
tendency to seek ad hoc, temporary solutions to complex,
long-range problems.[19]

Research for an educational program this extensive is unavailable. In last forty years social science research has not been a priority within the defense spending as science and technology research portfolio as become a high priority.[20] The Department of Defense's own ingrained culture is unlikely to move resources from technology and weapons systems into developing self-sufficient warfighters that operate in foreign cultures along a broad spectrum. Foreign cultures are already closed systems and any additional effort to infiltrate the foreign culture will be "wasted." The United States Warfighter operating in a foreign culture will always be a minority and never fully integrated into the foreign culture. The majority/minority boundary is fixed or more like a semi-permeable membrane[21] that cannot be broken down, and most cultures will hinder aggressive integration.

Conclusion

Cultural knowledge education allows the warfighter to build strong relationships with foreign populations. Developing good relationships will help to defeat the enemy. Generally, cultural awareness training is good at producing warfighters who understand local customs and cultures, but they cause friction by not being well

integrated. The best approach to solving this dilemma is to develop an educational program that meets these needs.

The Warfighter must transparently operate in foreign cultures to develop effective relationships with the people. These skills must be developed through cultural knowledge education through immersion, interation, and integration. This education is paramount if the United States is to remain a military superpower relying on less firepower while also remaining legitimate with building allies in the world.

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